

# TEACHING ECONOMICS THROUGH COMMUNITY-ENGAGED LEARNING

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# WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Community engagement describes collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity (Carnegie).

# WHAT IS COMMUNITY-ENGAGED LEARNING?

Community-engaged learning (CEL) is a pedagogical approach that involves students, community partners, and instructors working together to analyze and address community-identified priorities through experiential learning.

This high-impact educational practice:

- Meets student learning objectives through course content, community engagement, and critical reflection
- Generates and applies academic knowledge in community-based settings to address priorities and opportunities as identified through mutually beneficial collaboration with community partners
- Helps anchor the university in the local community by providing meaningful connections between teaching, research, and service and the priorities of our community

## WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF COMMUNITY-ENGAGED LEARNING?

- **Direct Service:** students engage in short-term projects with a partner in a community context
- **Capacity Building, or Indirect Service:** students help build the capacity of an organization by using their academic knowledge to complete projects requested by the community partner
- **Community-Based (Participatory) Research:** students examine a question or concern articulated by a community partner through research or academic study
- **Social Action & Advocacy:** students engage with a community partner to analyze a social problem, develop an action plan, and advocate for social change

# HOW DID I INCORPORATE COMMUNITY-ENGAGED LEARNING

## Fall 2024 Urban Economics Course

- Taken from the CNU Course Catalog: “Students undertake an analysis of the economic factors that have given rise to the formation of urban centers. We discuss what makes them unique, and study urban problems such as poverty, crime, homelessness and housing conditions, traffic congestion and urban growth.”
- Urban Economics explores the study of *where* economic activity takes place and *why* economic agents choose to locate near each other and in certain areas. We will also study economic activity that is inherently place-based such as the housing market and local government policy.
- The course answers questions such as, “Why do cities exist?” “Why do firms locate near each other?” and “Who benefits from urban economic re-development?”

# COMPARISON TO A TRADITIONAL COURSE

## TRADITIONAL COURSE

- Students might write an individual term paper that is graded by the instructor and may or may not have a specific focus.
- Course material primarily delivered through traditional lectures, readings, and assignments.
- Students engage in class discussions and homework assignments.

## CEL COURSE

- Students produce a deliverable to contribute to the mission of a community partner.
- Students may participate in partner-led lessons, field trips, and community-based readings.
- Students also engage in critical reflection throughout the course.

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN URBAN ECONOMICS

- Four topic areas
  - Housing
  - Environment
  - Food Access
  - Transportation
- Projects
  - Write a policy report
  - Write a policy brief
  - Deliver presentation to class, community partners, and other stakeholders
  - Critical reflection

## A NOTE ON CRITICAL REFLECTION

- Critical reflection helps students to bridge their classroom content with their community engagement projects.
  - It should be intentional and structured
- It can take many different forms
  - Class discussions, written essays, small groups, and more!
- Critical reflection is crucial for ensuring we are accomplishing our goals as instructors and that the experience is connecting for the students.

## OTHER WAYS TO IMPLEMENT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Direct service projects
- Financial literacy programs
- Deeper research projects

## WHY SHOULD YOU CONSIDER COMMUNITY ENGAGED LEARNING?

- Better ground yourself, your students, and your department in your local community
- Help students to understand the “human” side of economics
- Develop professional and career-readiness skills through hands-on experiences

## STUDENT COMMENTS AND REFLECTIONS: COMMUNITY CONNECTION

- “When we finally presented these topics..., I felt a profound sense of accomplishment knowing that my group and I had done something of plausible significance that may result in positive change within my community.”
- “The feeling of doing something that could have the potential to make other people’s lives more enjoyable became a motivating factor for myself while conducting research.”
- “This project made me realize that economics is about people and communities, even though I've always thought of it as being about markets and statistics”
- “I remember sitting there just being woken up by all these issues in what's going on in our backyard. Being a college student in this area... you can get lost in what's actually happening around you and this class was definitely a reminder for me of what's actually important.”

## STUDENT COMMENTS AND REFLECTIONS: CAREER READINESS

- “This course, along with the CEL project, has really given me a sense of confidence as I look ahead to entering the workforce, especially in a field related to economics”
- “This is a different type of learning than I have ever experienced before and I feel like through real world assignments like this I am able to gain more than I would from a traditional lecture style course.”
- “This project has been extremely beneficial to me as an economics major because I got to see the theories and topics we learned about in class being exhibited in the real world.”
- “This class gave me an experience that I have never had in any level of education. Being able to see how economics can be used to solve social issues was very inspiring”

THANK YOU!

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